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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALMATY 000808

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PHUM PREF PTER KZ POLITICAL

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: UZBEK REFUGEES UNDER RENEWED PRESSURE?

REF: A. 05 ALMATY 4441

B. 05 ALMATY 4393

Classified By: DCM MARK ASQUINO FOR REASONS 1.4(B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: In a February 28 meeting in Almaty, imam Abidkhan Nazarov of the Tukhtaboy mosque in Tashkent told Poloff that he fears that Uzbek and Kazakhstani authorities have recently intensified their efforts to locate him and his followers in Kazakhstan. Nazarov voiced his concerns three months after nine Uzbek UNHCR asylum seekers were arrested in Kazakhstan and deported to Uzbekistan without due process (reftels). Days before his conversation with Poloff, on February 24, two of Nazarov's followers were detained in Almaty and questioned about Nazarov's whereabouts. Nazarov told Poloff that he believes that the Uzbek National Security Service (SNB) is aware that Sweden has granted him refugee status, and, in cooperation with the Kazakhstani National Security Committee (KNB), has intensified efforts to locate and abduct him before he relocates to Sweden.

12. (C) Summary (continued): Narashimha Rao, an Almaty-based UNHCR protection officer, took a different view of the February 24 detentions, telling Poloff that it didn't appear that the men had been targeted as followers of Nazarov, and that even once their identities were known, questioning on the subject of Nazarov's whereabouts had been brief and desultory. Rao told Poloff that, while he obviously could not rule out the existence of an Uzbek-led campaign to locate and abduct Nazarov, none of Nazarov's followers had approached his office in recent days complaining of an intensified campaign against them. Rao told Poloff that Nazarov's travel documents should be ready "within two weeks." End Summary.

Nazarov: Uzbeks Mounting a Last-Minute Campaign

13. (C) Poloff met outside the Embassy with imam Nazarov in Almaty on February 28. The meeting followed email exchanges with SCA/CEN on Nazarov's safety. A journalist familiar with Nazarov's situation briefed the DCM and Poloff on Nazarov's concerns, and set-up the meeting with Nazarov.

14. (C) Nazarov told Poloff that both the SNB and KNB were aware that he had recently been granted refugee status by Sweden, and that his departure from Kazakhstan was imminent. As a consequence, he said, both had intensified a campaign to locate his hiding place and deport him to Uzbekistan. (Note: Nazarov has been in hiding in Almaty since fleeing Shymkent in late December, following the "arrest" there of nine of his followers.) As evidence of the campaign to locate him, Nazarov explained that two of his followers had been detained on February 24, ostensibly to answer questions about a murder that had occurred in their neighborhood. Once they arrived at the police station, however, the two men complained that "the murder was never mentioned again." A KNB agent had been called in, and the men were questioned repeatedly about Nazarov's whereabouts. Nazarov alleged that the two men had overheard the Kazakhstani police talking to Uzbek security agents during the course of the questioning. Rao had finally intervened, Nazarov said, and managed to convince the General Prosecutor that it was illegal to detain the men further. After nearly 24 hours in detention, the two men were released on February 25.

15. (C) Nazarov told Poloff that he was confident that neither the GOK nor the Uzbek authorities knew the location of his hiding place -- if they did, he would already have been abducted. While Nazarov was reasonably confident that he could remain hidden until he and his family (a son, a daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren) were given their travel documents, he was concerned about his "more than 60" followers, including women and children, who were seeking refugee status from within Kazakhstan. Most were afraid to go the UNHCR office, he said, for fear of being seen, and thus their cases were moving slowly or not at all. Nazarov also said that he feared that the Uzbeks might stage a last-minute accident or explosion in Almaty, blame it on him, and thus derail his planned departure from Kazakhstan. Nazarov appealed to Poloff to use the Embassy's influence to accelerate UNHCR processing of his followers' cases.

16. (C) On March 1, UNHCR's Rao told Poloff that he was not convinced that the two men detained by police on February 24 had been targeted as follower's of Nazarov. Rao explained that there had, in fact, been a murder in their neighborhood, and that the police had detained "all the foreigners in the area" for questioning. Nor had the men placed much emphasis on the questions regarding Nazarov's whereabouts in their subsequent debriefs with Rao. According to what the men had told Rao, once the police had ascertained their identities and asylum-seeker status, they had asked about Nazarov's whereabouts -- but only briefly and without urgency. The KNB agent, Rao admitted, had left the two men his card and suggested that he would contact them again in the future to discuss Nazarov further, but he had not been threatening.

17. (C) Rao told Poloff that he had kept the Ministry of Foreign Affairs fully abreast of the status of Nazarov's case, and that his MFA contacts knew that Nazarov had been granted refugee status, and that his case was nearing a conclusion. However, his GOK contacts had never pressured him to reveal Nazarov's location. Rao reiterated that Nazarov had not contacted Rao recently about heightened security concerns. Rao noted that, in the past, he had secured a GOK commitment to grant Nazarov uniformed security if he wished -- an offer which Nazarov had not accepted. Rao acknowledged that many of Nazarov's followers likely felt uneasy about approaching UNHCR's office, but denied that their asylum cases had been delayed as a consequence: bureaucracy, and not a lack of contact with the applicants, was to blame for the delays.

18. (C) Summing up his office's role in protecting Nazarov and his followers from extra-legal abductions like those that occurred in Shymkent in November, Rao said "my office can only guarantee them legal protection. Nothing can protect them from illegal actions."

19. (C) Comment. Due to Kazakhstan's deportation of nine Uzbek refugees from Shymkent in November (Ref A) we fully understand Nazarov's concern for his safety and that of his followers. If, in fact, the SNB is actively looking for Nazarov in Kazakhstan (a point which we considered unproved but possible), it stands to reason that any pressure they might be applying to his followers will diminish once he relocates to Sweden. Thus, the weeks ahead are likely the most critical. We will maintain our contact with Nazarov's intermediaries, as well as with the local UNHCR office.

ORDWAY